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Michael F. Easley
Governor

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William G. Ross Jr.
Secretary, DENR

PARKS SET RECORD ATTENDANCE IN '07

State parks in North Carolina reported record attendance in 2007 of 13.4 million visits, despite a prolonged drought that closed facilities at some parks and curtailed the summer season for swimming and boating.

The visitation totals represent an increase of 6.5 percent over 2006 and a dramatic 260 percent increase over the past 25 years. In 1982, 5.1

million people visited the state parks system.

The previous high attendance for the parks system was 13.2 million in 2002.

"Strong visitation at our parks reflects the value North Carolinians place on outdoor recreation and the contribution of the state parks system to North Carolina's tourism economy and to the economies of the communities where the

parks are located," said state parks director Lewis Ledford.

"The state's population growth has increased pressure on our infrastructure of state parks as it has in other areas. We are addressing that with our New Parks for a New Century initiative, which to this point, has brought four new state parks into development."

Effects of an exceptional

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DISMAL SWAMP STATE PARK OPENS

The state parks system ceremonially opened Dismal Swamp State Park March 21 with the dedication of a visitor center and related facilities on the banks of the Dismal Swamp Canal.

More than 150 people attended on a brisk holiday weekend and those included county commissioners, mayors and councilmen from nearby towns and State Rep. Bill Owens.

North Carolina's General Assembly has its good days and bad, Owens said. "This is a good day for the General Assembly, to see everybody pull together and see something worthwhile happen. It's good to see this become a reality and I certainly hope we can improve on this."

Owens was instrumen-



STATE REP. BILL OWENS SPEAKS AT THE DEDICATION CEREMONY.

tal in helping to open North Carolina's 32nd state park and has been a strong advocate of the state parks system.

The initial facilities represent an investment of

\$3.5 million from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the principal funding source for state parks capital projects and land acquisition.

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Department of Environment and Natural Resources

UP CLOSE AND 'PERSONNEL'

Greta Dunn is the new office assistant at Elk Knob State Park. She is a graduate of Northwest Ashe High School and has more than two years related experience including employment with Southern States Cooperative and the Ashe County Board of Education.

Robert Carasiti has

been promoted to Maintenance Mechanic III at William B. Umstead State Park. He joined the staff in 2006 after earning an associate's degree from Suffolk Community College and attending Briarcliff College in Patchogue, NY.

Daniel Martin is a new ranger at Eno River State

Park. He previously worked at the park as a maintenance mechanic, a general utility worker and a seasonal employee. He attended high school in Gnadenhutten, Ohio and graduated from Ohio University in 1998 with a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology.

Michael Carriker has been promoted to Maintenance Mechanic III at Lake James State Park. After graduating from Northwest Cabarrus High School, he joined the park staff in 2007. He has more than 16 years related experience.

Charles Zidar has been promoted from exhibits specialist to curator of the exhibits program, a newly created position. Zidar earned a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from Ohio State University and master's degree in museum studies from the University of Oklahoma. He joined the division in 2004 after working for the Museum of Natural Sciences and the Graves Museum of Archaeology in Dania Beach, Fla.

Tammie Vass joined the staff of Haw River State Park as administrative assistant. She is a graduate of Pinecrest High School in Southern Pines and Sandhills Community College. She formerly worked for the DOT in Greensboro and has more than 10 years of related experience.

Craig Autry is a new maintenance mechanic at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. A graduate of Northwood High School in Pittsboro and Central Carolina Community College, he formerly worked for the Division of Forest Resources and the towns of Apex, Pitts-

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From The Director's Desk

It was no great surprise to us that the state parks system set a record for attendance at 13.4 million visits in 2007, despite a prolonged drought and soaring gasoline prices.

There are other factors at work, not the least of which is North Carolina's rapid population growth. Eight of the 100 fastest growing counties in the U.S. are in North Carolina, and Wake County ranked seventh in the number of new residents (38,841), according to a March U.S. Census report. Charlotte was the seventh fastest-growing metro area (66,724 newcomers). Remarkable statistics.

We are also increasing the number of parks, facilities and recreation opportunities, so it's likely that attendance will continue to grow. This offers tremendous challenges to our state parks. There will be demand for even more facilities and this must be balanced with our mission of careful stewardship. We must work harder than ever to maintain the visitor experience in parks that, at times, seem to be bursting at the seams.

It was our great pleasure to host three public events in the past few weeks – the opening of Dismal Swamp State Park and its visitor center, a celebration for a major land acquisition at Haw River State Park, and the groundbreaking for a new visitor center at Merchants Millpond State Park.

An even greater pleasure was to witness the strong turnout at each of the events. At Dismal Swamp, we may have had the largest turnout ever at a state park dedication ceremony, with more than 150 folks appearing on a holiday weekend. Across the board, the state parks enjoyed truly heartfelt support from our neighbors in the local communities. That kind of support is vital to the success of our parks and should never be taken for granted.

Sincerely,



Lewis Ledford

ATTENDANCE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

drought across the state began to be felt in mid-summer as swimming areas shrank and then disappeared and lake levels dipped below boat ramps and piers.

At one point, Lake James in Burke County was 13 feet below normal and no boat access was available.

Water levels at Jordan, Falls and Kerr lakes all dropped at least 10 feet below normal. Nonetheless, the three state recreation areas on the reservoirs attracted 3.1 million visitors in 2007, virtually unchanged from a year earlier.

Jordan Lake recorded 1.13 million visits during the year; Kerr Lake had 1.14; and Falls Lake had 890,496.

Another aspect of the drought was an outdoor burning ban during the fall. Park superintendents reported that many campsites were left empty as temperatures dropped and campers were limited to using only cooking stoves.

Among 31 state parks and four state recreation areas open to the public, 23 reported increases in attendance in 2007.

Jockey's Ridge State Park in Dare County reported

the highest attendance at 1.5 million visits, an increase of 43 percent over last year. Fort Macon State Park in Carteret County was close behind with 1.2 million, unchanged from a year ago.

Other parks with significant increases were Cliffs of the Neuse State Park in Wayne County (20 percent), Gorges State Park in Transylvania County (23 percent), Fort Fisher State Recreation Area in New Hanover County (34 percent) and Hammocks Beach State Park in Onslow County (52 percent).

The improvement at Hammocks Beach can largely be attributed to unusually low numbers in 2006. Ferry service to the Bear Island, the park's main feature, was often interrupted by sand encroachment into the island's approach channel.

An emergency dredging project in 2006 cleared the channel allowing the park to use larger ferries on a more regular schedule. This year, visitors had full access to a new bathhouse and picnic complex completed in 2004.

At Lake Norman State Park, a new swimming beach

and picnic grounds attracted record numbers of visitors until the drought forced the park to close the beach in late summer. For the year, the park recorded 523,008 visitors, up 17 percent.

(A CHART WITH DETAILED VISITATION INFORMATION FOR 2007 IS ON PAGE 15.)

PERSONNEL

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boro and Lillington and the Lee County Parks and Recreation Department.

Jacob Vitak joined the staff at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area as a ranger. He attended high school in Frostburg, MD and graduated from West Virginia University with a bachelor's degree in wildlife management. He worked as a seasonal at Hammocks Beach State Park and with The Nature Conservancy in Maryland and North Dakota.

Clifford Crenshaw is a new maintenance mechanic at Lake Norman State Park. A veteran and graduate of Central Piedmont Community College, he has more than 30 years related experience including working at Duke Power Co. and the N.C. Department of Crime Control and Public Safety.

'PARK' IT

WITH A STATE PARKS
SPECIALTY LICENSE TAG



The Division of Parks and Recreation is accepting applications and payment for the first 300 license plates. There is a \$30 fee in addition to regular license fees (\$60 for personalized plates). Additional fees support conservation through the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds.

**Applications online at www.ncparks.gov
or write: Adrienne McCoig, N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
1615 MSC, Raleigh, NC 27699-1615**

DISMAL SWAMP

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The event dedicated a 7,050-square-foot visitor center at the park's entrance and support facilities including a swing-span, pedestrian bridge across the canal, a parking area, exhibit hall and a system of boardwalks, decks and gazebos that allow park visitors to experience the historic Great Dismal Swamp and learn about the park's rich cultural and natural heritage.

The park also offers about 16 miles of hiking/biking trails fashioned from a network of old logging roads alongside canals and ditches.

The 14,344 acres of state land was acquired in 1974 with the help of The Nature Conservancy and was managed as a state natural area without public access until 2007 when the General Assembly authorized it as Dismal Swamp State Park.

"Just think of what the state parks system is," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "It is the tallest mountain in Eastern America, the highest living sand dune, three of the nation's wild and scenic rivers, iconic landmarks such as Pilot Mountain and Chimney Rock.

"We're officially opening Dismal Swamp State Park to take its place among those treasures."

Ledford told the group that beyond being a landmark, a state park is a place where a community can reconnect with nature and its history,

FIFTEEN RANGERS ADVANCE LAW ENFORCEMENT STATUS

Fifteen state park rangers received Intermediate Professional Law Enforcement Certification in January from the N.C. Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission.

To obtain intermediate status, an officer with a four-year college degree must have at least two years of full-time service and accumulate at least 160 hours of law enforcement supervisory or ranger activity-type training after being sworn as special peace officers.

A significant number of park superintendents and rangers have advanced or intermediate certification.

The 15 rangers certified are Chad Hagie, Philip King, Paul Kalish, Katherine Scala, Jason Anthony, Garrett German, Andrew Chilton, O'Kelly Safley, William Duke, Ronald Anderson, Scott Coffman, Brock Martin, Jason Gwinn, Brandy Mangum and Bryan Wilder.



RIBBON IS CUT ON THE NEW PARK'S VISITOR CENTER, where citizens can develop a conservation ethic and where a community's quality of life is improved.

Tim Aydlett, a member of the Parks and Recreation Authority and the park's citizen advisory committee, told the crowd the history of the state's acquisition of the property. He and his wife, Michelle Aydlett, are also founding members of the Friends of Dismal Swamp State Park.

Another speaker was Col. Dionysios Anninos, commander of the Norfolk District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the canal. Anninos pledged to work to limit commercial development and protect the recreational value of the canal. Dug around the turn of the 18th Century, the canal was a major trade artery in early years, but now is primarily a route for recreational boaters.

The state park is adjacent to the 111,000-acre Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The park is rich in natural resources including native stands of Atlantic white cedar and populations of black bear, bobcat and deer. It supports a large variety of migratory, neo-tropical songbirds and a significant number of butterfly species.

The visitor center's exhibit hall explores these natural resources as well as cultural history. The center also offers a classroom, a teaching auditorium and staff offices.

Construction of the project began in 2006. Lead designer was Alpha and Omega Group of Raleigh, and the general contractor was SEAVAC Corporation of Portsmouth, Va.

Since 1994, the state parks system has opened 19 visitor centers.

TRUST FUND AUTHORITY COMMITS FUNDS

The Parks and Recreation Authority committed funds from Certificates of Participation (COPs) to Chimney Rock, Elk Knob and Eno River state parks and the Mountains-to-Sea Trail at its March 14 session.

The 15-member authority met at the new Dismal Swamp State Park visitor center dedicated just a week later.

The COPs funding will be used for land acquisitions at the state parks and in the case of the state trail, to partner with local governments to acquire key tracts in the project's corridor.

The 2007 N.C. General Assembly authorized the issuance of \$50 million in COPs for land acquisition to be repaid from future revenues of the trust fund. The financing instruments are similar to bonds with a 20-year life span and have been used in the past for park expansions, most notably for a 3,000-acre acquisition and facilities at Lake James State Park.

Legislators also approved \$50 million in COPs to be issued by the Natural Heritage Trust Fund. The state parks system will seek additional grants for some of the same land projects from that source as well.

At Chimney Rock in Rutherford County, \$3.5 million will be set aside for acquisition of the Bottomless Pools area, a former tourist attraction on the southeast boundary of the Chimney Rock section of the developing state park.

COPs funding of \$15.1 million for Elk Knob will be directed toward a large land holding of 4,538 acres which



RANGER FLOYD WILLIAMS GIVES AN INTERPRETIVE TALK TO MEMBERS OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION AUTHORITY. MANY OF THEM TRAVELED TO MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK FOR A TOUR AND TO ATTEND A GROUNDBREAKING THE DAY AFTER THEIR MEETING AT DISMAL SWAMP.

lies between Elk Knob itself in Watauga county and park property on The Peak to the north in Ashe County. The property is a significant natural heritage area with 23 mountain bogs and at least 40 rare species.

Also at Elk Knob, property is being sought on the adjacent Snake Mountain, with \$2.32 million set aside for that project.

At Eno River in Durham and Orange counties, the parks system hopes to acquire 20 acres to protect key river tributaries with the help of the Eno River Association.

Carol Tingley, chief of research and long-range planning, told the authority that the Mountains-to-Sea funding is meant to help and reward local communities that have already been aggressive in setting aside land and developing projects to advance the 1,000-mile-long project.

The \$8.57 million in COPs funding, she said, will allow the state parks system

to acquire land to link trail segments in partnership with Greensboro, Guilford County, Alamance County, Hillsborough and the Triangle Land Conservancy in Johnston County.

In some cases, the state would own the properties and those segments of the trail would be under local management.

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail officially became a unit of the state parks system in 2000.

In other business, Louis Daniel, director of the Division of Marine Fisheries, presented priorities among 21 project proposals to be funded with \$20 million in COPs funding through the Waterfront Access and Marine Industry Fund. Although the projects are not part of the state parks system, they require approval by the trust fund authority.

Three new members of the authority – Hollis Wild, Daryle Bost and Boyd Lee -- were sworn to terms on the authority, and all 15 members

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SCHNEIDER IS CHIEF OF OPERATIONS

Greg Schneider, a 16-year veteran park ranger and superintendent, has been promoted to chief of operations for the state parks system. He succeeds Susan Tillotson, who retired in November after a 26-year career.

Schneider will be responsible for park operations, resource management, environmental education programming, law enforcement, safety and facility maintenance for the state's system of 33 state parks, four state recreation areas and 17 state natural areas covering nearly 200,000 acres.

"Greg is one of a new generation of state park administrators who has gained exceptional experience as a ranger, superintendent of three state parks and district superintendent," said Lewis Ledford, director of the Division of Parks and Recreation.

"The state parks system will value his leadership skills

as it continues to grow through conservation initiatives, develops its environmental education

programs and continues to serve nearly 13 million visitors each year."

Schneider is a native of Florida who grew up in North Carolina's Iredell County. He graduated from Wingate College in 1985, earning a bachelor's degree in business administration.

He is a certified environmental educator and has received the division's Special Achievement Award and the Distinguished Service Award. Schneider was named 1995 Ranger of the Year by the North Carolina Recreation and Parks Association. He is an active member of the National Audu-



bon Society.

Schneider was a seasonal employee before being hired as a park ranger at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area in 1991. He moved to Eno River State Park in 1997 and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area in 1998. He became superintendent at Fort Fisher in 2000, at Jones Lake State Park in 2002 and at Jordan Lake in 2004.

In October, he was named south district superintendent with management responsibility for 10 state parks.

Schneider holds advance law enforcement certification and in 1996, became the division's first certified law enforcement firearms instructor.

Schneider said, "I'm excited about the opportunity to serve North Carolina and to continue to work with the outstanding professionals in our state parks as we all work to preserve and protect the state's stunning natural heritage features."

WINDSOR MOVES TO PILOT MOUNTAIN

Matt Windsor, formerly the superintendent at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, has been named superintendent of Pilot Mountain State Park. He succeeds Barry Whitaker.

A superintendent is the chief of operations and administration at a state park or state recreation area with wide-ranging responsibilities for staffing, training, law enforcement, visitor services, natural resource protection and environmental education.

"Matt is an excellent choice as superintendent of Pilot Mountain State Park with

his well-rounded background in natural resource stewardship, environmental education and park management," said Lewis Ledford, director of the parks system.

"And, his familiarity with the area and its people will help us nurture our relationships in the local communities."

Windsor was raised in Tobaccoville, graduated from North Forsyth High School



and earned a bachelor's degree in parks, recreation and tourism management from North Carolina State University in 1997. He joined the state parks system as a ranger at Hanging Rock State Park in 1998. He has also served at Fort Macon and Jockey's Ridge state parks and worked as a science teacher in Forsyth County.

He was promoted to superintendent at Fort Fisher in September.

At various parks, Windsor has directed natural resource management programs as well as environmental educa-

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WALLACE TO GUIDE CHIMNEY ROCK

Adrienne Wallace, formerly superintendent of Mayo River State Park, has been named as the first superintendent of the new Chimney Rock State Park under development in Rutherford County.

A superintendent is the chief of operations and administration at a state park or state recreation area with wide-ranging responsibilities for staffing, training, law enforcement, visitor services, natural resource protection and environmental education.

Chimney Rock State Park was authorized in 2005 by the N.C. General Assembly. Land acquisition continues for the developing park, which now encompasses about 3,500 acres in the Hickory Nut Gorge.

The formerly private Chimney Rock Park, a popular tourist destination, was acquired by the state in May 2007 and added to the larger state park.

The attraction remains

open to the public under the management of Chimney Rock Management LLC through an agreement with the state parks system.

"Beyond her background as a ranger and environmental educator, Adrienne gained solid experience at Mayo River working with local communities and agencies in guiding the development of another of our new state parks," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

"In coming months, Adrienne will play a key role as the state parks system continues land acquisition in Hickory Nut Gorge, further integrates Chimney Rock Park as a state parks entity and develops a master plan for the state park as a whole."

A native of Erin, TN,



Wallace earned a bachelor's degree in parks, recreation and tourism management from North Carolina State University in 1998. While in college, she was a seasonal employee at Morrow Mountain State Park and a naturalist at Eno River State Park and at Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area in Kentucky.

She joined the permanent staff at Eno River as a ranger in September 1998 and was promoted to superintendent at Mayo River in 2006. She is a certified environmental educator and a law enforcement instructor for the state parks system.

Wallace said, "I'm excited to join this new and unique endeavor as we continue to conserve and protect our state's significant natural resources while at the same time serving citizens and visitors through our partnership with Chimney Rock Park's management team and highly skilled staff."

WINDSOR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

tion efforts. He is a certified environmental educator and an open water lifeguard.

"I consider it a privilege to be able to help protect the park that I grew up visiting," Windsor said. "I look forward to working with the staff and the community to manage the outstanding natural resources of North Carolina's most visible national natural landmark."

Pilot Mountain State Park was created in 1968 and encompasses 3,651 acres. The park recorded 404,360 visits in 2007.



ALTERNATIVE FUELS

ALTERNATIVE FUEL TANKS HAVE BEEN INSTALLED AT FALLS LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA. THE PARK HAS 2,000-GALLON TANKS FOR E85 AND E10 ETHANOL FUEL AS WELL AS A 500-GALLON TANK FOR B20. THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM HAS BEEN WORKING TO OFFER ALTERNATIVE FUEL WHEREVER IT'S PRACTICAL.



PARKS AND RECREATION AUTHORITY MEMBERS AND PARKS SYSTEM STAFF BREAK GROUND FOR VISITOR CENTER.

VISITOR CENTER CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

The state parks system launched construction of a 9,575-square-foot visitor center at Merchants Millpond State Park March 15 with a groundbreaking ceremony at a hilltop site overlooking the historic pond.

More than 50 people attended, including members of the Parks and Recreation Authority, which met the day before at a spanking new visitor center at nearby Dismal Swamp State Park.

Similar to visitor centers built at 18 state parks and state recreation areas since 1994, the facility will offer a unique design reflecting the park's character and will feature an exhibit hall, teaching auditorium, classroom and workroom along with administrative offices.

The project also includes a parking area and freestanding, 600-square-foot outdoor classroom, and it represents an investment of \$3.6 million from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

"You can see through artist's renderings what a visitor center will look like, but it's important to understand what a state park visitor center is," said Lewis Ledford, director of the parks system. "Education is really the principal focus at our visitor centers, although they also serve as gathering places for the community and help give each park an identity."

Frank Rountree, a member of the Merchants Millpond park advisory committee, said he began exploring the millpond area as a young boy and realized early on it needed protection.

"All of us will benefit from this investment to protect, enhance and enjoy the natural resources that are here," he said.

The Gates County community has always



ARTIST'S CONCEPTION OF VISITOR CENTER DESIGN.

shared in the stewardship of the millpond and the state park, Jonathan Howes, chairman of the trust fund authority, told the crowd "It's a place that's meaningful to all North Carolinians. I'm grateful to you for all you've done here."

The visitor center will be the first state park project certified through the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program of the U.S. Green Building Council, although several earlier projects have met many of the criteria of the green building guidelines.

Resource-saving features will include a geothermal heat pump, a rainwater collection system, low-flow and waterless toilet fixtures and extensive use of natural lighting. Builders will use local materials whenever possible, including Atlantic white cedar, 95 percent of which will come from downed trees in the Dismal Swamp.

Other LEED certified structures in the planning stage are visitor centers at Fort Macon, Raven Rock and Cliffs of the Neuse state parks.

The Merchants Millpond project's designer of record is Frank Harmon, Architect, of Raleigh. General contractor is SEVAC Corporation of Portsmouth, Va.

HERRING AIDED BY STATE PARK PROJECT

In hopes of providing river herring more than 1,000 acres in which to spawn, Merchants Millpond State Park, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the N.C. Department of Transportation have partnered to install a fish ladder on the pond's new spillway.

Merchants Millpond's original dam and spillway built more than 200 years ago had effectively blocked the natural migration of river herring into the millpond and adjacent Lassiter Swamp.

The DOT incorporated the structure into its contract for renovation of the spillway and a nearby bridge on Millpond Road (SR 1403), and the federal agency provided technical help.

"It's our hope the fish ladder will encourage the migration of the river herring into the pond and the swamp and hopefully aid in the recovery of this species which has been so important in the history and the natural resources of this region," said Park Superintendent Jay Greenwood. "When the herring were plentiful they provided sustenance for men and wildlife alike."

TRUST FUND

were given a summary of this year's local grant applications.

The Division of Parks and Recreation received 93 applications from local governments asking for \$29.2 million in trust fund assistance, and those will be considered in detail in May.

Thirty percent of the trust fund is set aside for matching grants for local park



FISH LADDER OPENS MERCHANTS MILLPOND TO SPAWNING HERRING.

The fish ladder is a metal structure that offers a channel 70 feet long and four feet wide across the spillway with a gentle grade and a baffle every few feet to slow the water flow.

Greenwood said that staff with both the state park and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission will monitor the project over time to gauge its success.

The river herring once provided more than 10 million pounds of food each year for North Carolinians. Each spring, the return of the river herring provided a food source that could be preserved in salt without the need for ice. Many

families could depend on regular meals of river herring and cornbread during lean times.

The herring also sustained wildlife such as striped bass, largemouth bass, yellow perch, white perch, cormorants, herons, ospreys and bald eagles.

By 2006, herring catch had fallen to less than 100,000 pounds. A reduction of 99 percent over 40 years in the herring population is blamed on over-fishing, loss of habitat, decline in water quality and ocean by-catch.

River herring are a combination of blueback herring and alewives. Both species reach about 12 inches in length and look very similar. They occur in the Atlantic ocean from Canada to South Carolina and are anadromous, which means they spend most of their lives in saltwater but return to freshwater in the spring to spawn.

After spawning, the adults return to the Atlantic. The juveniles go to sea in early winter. By age four, the river herring begin returning to their natal rivers annually to spawn. Each year that they return, the river herring are more productive.

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acquisition and development. Since the fund was established in 1994, more than \$109 million in local grants have been awarded.

As the last order of business, Dismal Swamp State Park Superintendent Joy Greenwood gave the authority a brief tour of the newly opened park and presented a program on its history and natural resources.

HAW PARK SUPPORTERS SAVOR SUCCESS

Supporters of Haw River State Park joined the parks system to take a moment to savor success at a March 4 celebration marking the addition of more than 800 acres to the developing park.

“If ever there was a day to celebrate the power of partnership, it’s this day,” said Bill Ross, secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, as nearly 100 park supporters crowded a meeting room of The Summit at Haw River State Park.

On Feb. 27, the state closed a deal to add 692 acres adjacent to The Summit that had been slated to be a residential golf community. The property, in three tracts, had been assembled by Bluegreen Corp. of Boca Raton, Fla., which withdrew its request to rezone the land in northern Guilford County.

The \$14 million acquisition will be financed through certificates of participation to be repaid with future revenues into the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

Also on March 4, the Council of State gave approval to acquire 140 acres northeast of the Summit. The land, which was originally intended for a housing development, will be acquired for \$5.75 million.

The acquisitions give the fledgling park a base for facility development separate from The Summit’s 300 acres as well as high-quality natural resource areas along the headwaters of the Haw.

Ross said the group should also celebrate the power of teamwork and innovation.

Innovation marked Guilford County’s foray into land conservation in the 1980s with formation of the Guilford Open Space Committee



DENR SECRETARY BILL ROSS JR. LEFT, TALKS WITH LEWIS LEDFORD, DIRECTOR OF STATE PARKS, GRAHAM PERVIER OF ROCKINGHAM COUNTY AND REID PHILLIPS OF GREENSBORO AT THE CELEBRATION.



DAVID CRAFT, OF THE HAW RIVER STATE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE, THANKS SUPPORTERS.

and a \$12 million local bond issue to begin an initiative to add parks and the idea for a state park in the area.

David Craft, a member of the park’s advisory committee and a leader in the Citizens for Haw River State Park – an advocacy group that arose during the rezoning effort – thanked Bluegreen Corp., “for putting up with a lot of uncertainty. This wasn’t easy for a lot of us.”

David Edwards, a Bluegreen vice president, attended the celebration.

Craft’s thanks extended to commissioners in both Guilford and Rockingham counties, the area’s legislative delegation, the business community, the news media and original owners of the property – Thaxton Richardson, Forrest Campbell and Annie B. Cox.

Craft said the citizens group is anxious to continue helping the park develop. “We’ve got a lot to love and look forward to loving it for many years to come.”

Lewis Ledford, director of the state parks system, reminded attendees that when the park was authorized by the General Assembly in 2003 as part of the New Parks for a New Century Initiative, there were doubters because of the competition for land in the area.

The headwaters area was one of only 12 sites in the state that immediately met criteria for a new state park under the initiative.

True believers, Ledford said, included the local governments, the Guilford Open Space Committee and the Piedmont Land Conservancy. Facing the pressures of growth, the local community was prompted to make a firm decision, he said.

“They decided that conservation and recreation would necessarily be part of the growth and development of this area.”

DENR HOLDS FIRST EDUCATION FORUM

More than 110 employees from 23 divisions of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources gathered at Haw River State Park Feb. 11-12 for the first-ever departmental environmental education forum.

While DENR employees have always played an active role in other education meetings and initiatives, this was the first environmental education function solely aimed at DENR staff

“The purpose of the forum was twofold. We wanted to better inform all of the DENR about the great EE programs that already exist in the department, and we wanted to encourage more collaboration on EE programs – between internal DENR divisions and also between DENR educators and the greater environmental education community in North Carolina,” said Lisa Tolley, director of the Office of Environmental Education. “I believe the forum accomplished these goals.”

The forum was the brainchild of Chief Deputy Secretary Bill Laxton and Sue McBean, superintendent of the state park and The Summit, the state parks system’s environmental education center.

Laxton felt a meeting of the educators was timely. “Our staff provides a significant amount of environmental education experiences for teachers, students and the public. Environmental education is critical for increasing our state’s environmental literacy and the department views that as a top priority,” he said.

As Laxton says, environmental education is one of DENR’s seven strategic directions, and several of the department’s natural resource agencies and regulatory divisions have educators on staff.

In addition, DENR’s Office of Environmental Education serves as an information clearinghouse, provides support and consultation to DENR educators, manages the environmental education certification program and provides input on state and national curriculum standards.

The forum included participation by recognized experts on environmental education. The keynote address as delivered by Dr. Elin Kelsey, a noted author, consultant and adjunct professor of environmental education and communications at Royal Roads University in Canada.

Kelsey was followed by Dr. Chris Ohana, professor of science education at Western Wash-

ington University and the current field editor for Science and Children, a national science teachers publication. Ohana wrote the widely read and well-received editor’s note Looking at Environmental Education, which re-examined the relationship between science education and environmental education.

The event closed with a touching and motivational call to action by Tom Earnhardt, respected author, naturalist and the producer, writer and host of the UNC-Television series Exploring North Carolina.

Other forum activities included sessions led by: Dr. John Wear, director of the Catawba College Center for the Environment; Eleanor Hasse, secondary science consultant for the Department of Public Instruction; Randy Senzig, science teacher, Fuquay-Varina High School; Peggy Sloan, education curator, N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher; and, Mike Newton-Ward, social marketing consultant with the Division of Public Health.

The forum also featured a panel entitled Non-Formal Education: Forging Environmental Connections and Ecological Literacy which featured Lewis Ledford, director, Division of Parks and Recreation; David Jones, director, N.C. Zoological Park; Betsy Bennett, director, N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences; David Griffin, director, N.C. Aquariums; and Lisa Tolley.

Attendees agreed that there is a renewed sense of mission and a new dedication to partnerships, both inside and outside of DENR.

Attendees were asked at the end of the conference what they planned to do after the event. Here are a few responses:

“Work on recruiting and hiring more racially diverse environmental education staff members; communicate with partners more; build in more social marketing;”

“Use conversations more and not lectures so much; explore new audiences, i.e. adults, minorities, faith-based organizations; learn more about other DENR programs and resources so I can collaborate more;”

“Get in touch with DENR folks in my area and start collaborating with them more; schedule more environmental education programs and sustainability programs.”

DENR plans to continue discussions and strategize on how to increase interdepartmental cooperation and partnerships.

BEACON BIG CHANGE FOR EMPLOYEES

By Bill Laxton
DENR Chief Deputy Secretary

If you enjoy getting paid, please read this.

Starting April 1, all payroll and human resources functions in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources will be conducted using a new business system called BEACON, an acronym for Building Enterprise Access for North Carolina's Core Operation Needs.

The launch of BEACON represents one of the largest overhauls ever of any business system in state government and will be some significant adjustments for all of you.

The good news is that the changes brought about by our conversion to BEACON will make it easier for state employees to view and print copies of their pay stubs, to securely update their personal information such as addresses and banking information and to access their W-2 information. I'll explain more about how BEACON works in a moment.

But first, I can't stress enough how important it is that each of you better familiarize yourself about this important conversion. I urge each of you to attend an information session about BEACON. Several have been scheduled at DENR facilities throughout the state, and more are planned.

To learn more, go to the DENR home page (www.enr.state.nc.us) and click on "BEACON" under the Current Events heading.

The information sessions are 1.5 hours and will explain the new system and its advantages. In addition to the sessions, you can go online and learn more about BEACON by reading an overview – with a short quiz included – on the new system. There is an overview for rank-and-file employees called the Employee Self Service and one for supervisors called the Manager Self Service.

These are at: http://www.beacon.nc.gov/training/wbt/course/beacon_overview/start.html. The 120 or so DENR employees involved in payroll or human resources functions should already be enrolling in a three-day training session to enable these "core users" to teach others how to use BEACON.

So, why are we making the change? Overhauling the state's core business system is long overdue because the systems supporting business

functions now are more than 20 years old and offer limited functionality.

Put another way, the system that ensures that each of us gets a paycheck and has up-to-date vital information is at risk of failing because of its age, withdrawal of vendor support and its maintenance and upkeep by a work force that is reaching retirement age.

To ensure this doesn't happen, state government, several years ago, began overhauling the human resources and payroll functions. BEACON is the result.

Committees of state employees have been created to provide feedback and help with the changes associated with moving to a new business system. The BEACON project team has been working for more than a year with individual agencies to standardize and refine business practices and train their respective agencies' human resource and payroll staff on how to use the new system.

Some state agencies have already put BEACON in place or will do so at the same time as DENR. By April, all state employees will be using the system.

In simplest terms, BEACON's computer software allows state employees to handle many of their own human resource transactions. With minimal training and access to a computer with internet connection, employees can use the Employee Self Service to: provide timesheet information, view and print past and current pay stubs, view available leave balances, and enroll in the State Health Plan and apply for NCFlex benefits during enrollment periods.

Today, the business systems we rely on use outdated technology and do not communicate well with each other. In contrast, the BEACON software used for payroll will be linked to software for human resources.

So, when someone makes an adjustment to benefits, that information will automatically be factored into the paycheck.

Today, if someone wants to change withholding information, they must fill out paperwork and someone in payroll must record that information on a computer. Typing in that information sometimes takes a few weeks because DENR has limited staff to handle payroll and accounting functions for a department of more than 4,000

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BIOLOGISTS EYE RESTORATION ISSUES

Most people would agree that a state park should be left in its "natural state". Or if it's been unusually disturbed in the past, that park rangers and biologists should help it return to that natural state.

But, exactly what does that mean?

Was the land most natural just after the last ice age? Or, after American Indians burned cropland or Europeans colonized? Or, is climate change and threatened species making "natural" too much of a moving target.

Some of these questions were explored at the state parks system's second annual symposium on natural resource management in February at The Summit environmental education center at Haw River State Park.

The theme was "Ecological Restoration" for the system's natural resource management staff and about three



dozen park rangers whose job focus at their respective parks is natural resource protection.

Many of them are involved in restoration of trout streams, longleaf pine forests, clear-cut areas or other problem spots where human intervention left a lasting mark.

"There are a whole series of ethical issues associated with what we do," Ted Shear, an ecology professor at N.C. State University, told the group.

Most experts can't agree precisely on what restoration is but know that it has to do with "assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that's been degraded," Shear said. So, each state park almost needs its own definition.

Shear offered a few basic

rules including that rangers should do no harm, involve many people, including volunteers, in a project and to consider the public reaction to the results.

Brian Strong, head of the parks system's resource management team, said purchases of new parkland are creating more opportunities than ever for ecological restoration, but that leads to the need for discussion about how projects fit into the philosophy of the Division of Parks and Recreation.

That philosophy was recalled by John Taggart, a professor at UNC-Wilmington and a former resource management specialist for the parks.

Developed in 1995, guidelines state, "Natural resources will be managed and maintained by allowing the natural environment to evolve through natural processes with minimal influence from human activities."

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BEACON

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employees.

One of the questions many people have had is how safe the system is to use, especially since personal information can be reached from any computer with internet access.

The short answer: very secure. Prior to April, every employee in DENR will receive an employee identification card by mail. Each card will contain the employee's name and a unique identification number. This number will follow employees through their state service and into retirement.

Employees will use their identification numbers when accessing BEACON online. The employee identification system is designed to phase out the use of Social Security numbers as a means of identification to reduce the risk of identity theft and fraud.

In order to use the new system, employ-

ees must establish an NCID. Many of you already have this because it is the same access identification used for other statewide systems. Please contact your division's NCID administrator or your supervisor to ensure you have an active NCID.

To better serve you, the folks in BEACON have assembled a team of support specialists in one location to help answer questions and identify impacts the shared services approach will have on each agency.

I hope this column has answered some of your questions and inspired others.

This is going to be perhaps one of the most important changes most of you will see in 2008. So, learn as much as you can about BEACON by doing the online overview and referring to the Web sites listed in this column.

And, if you still have things you don't understand, please don't hesitate to ask questions.

SEA TURTLES GIVE NOD TO DREDGING

By Sam Bland, Ranger
Hammocks Beach State Park

Last spring, Hammocks Beach State Park was able to dredge a short but crucial section of Cow Channel to improve ferry access to Bear Island at low tide. Even though the dredging improved access to the most beautiful barrier island on the east coast, the project created a dilemma – where to place the spoil material.

All the spoil sites used by the park in the past had reached capacity, leaving the park with only one option that had never been considered before. That was to put the spoil on Bear Island.

Earlier studies of the potential spoil material revealed that the material to be dredged was compatible with the existing beach sand on the island. This cleared the way for the material to be placed on the beach, but it was important to minimize any environmental disturbance.

Typically when spoil material is pumped onto a barrier island beach, it is used to widen and raise the elevation, and this can damage the surf zone habitat for invertebrates.

To minimize this potential damage, the spoil pumped



to Bear Island was placed high on the beach at the base of the existing dunes. This helped reinforce the primary dune line that took a beating from Hurricane Ophelia in 2005.

Before pumping, a long trough was prepared parallel to the base of a 1,500-foot section of dune line. The trough bordered the existing dune line on one side, and sand was pushed up on the ocean side to create the other wall.

The sandy slurry was then pumped to one end and allowed to drop its load of sand as it flowed to the other end of the trough. This resulted in a minimum amount of sand entering the surf zone.

Since pumping continued into May, it was important to take precautions against disturbing nesting loggerhead sea turtles and colonial nesting birds.

Historically on the island, all of the colonial nesters use sand spits at the island's

ends, so the potential for nesting birds in the spoil zone was extremely low. Nonetheless, habitat areas were patrolled to detect any nesting activity throughout the project.

Sea turtle nesting activity was a more realistic concern. However, nesting records since 1975 indicated that nesting activity in the disposal area during May was unlikely.

Still, we worried that a female coming ashore could get trapped in the trough or her eggs could get covered with too much sand. The contractor was not allowed to pump at night and could not begin pumping in the mornings until park staff had patrolled the beach to check for nesting activity.

There was no nesting activity during the project, but once pumping was completed, two sea turtles nested in the newly created dredge spoil dune area.

Both nests were quite successful. One had 80 eggs, with 72 hatchlings escaping from the dune. The other nest had 105 eggs with 103 hatchlings.

It appears this highly compatible beach quality sand passed the biggest test of all – approval by the sea turtles.

RESTORATION

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“That says we play the ball where it lies, so to speak” Taggart said.

But it still leaves room for interpretation when state parks get into the details of such projects as stream restoration, re-introduction of natural species, reverting pine plantations and restoring salt marshes, he said.

Restoration projects should have a strong scientific basis and should include consultation with whatever experts are available and precise instructions for outside contractors, he said.

The symposium discussed some past successes in the state parks. Ranger Sam Bland explained an estuary

shoreline restoration at Hammocks Beach State Park, and rangers Alan Rogers and Tim Johnson talked about introducing the first prescribed burn regimen for a western park at South Mountains State Park.

And, Kevin Tweedy of Baker Inc. outlined an extensive trout stream restoration at Stone Mountain State Park.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

DECEMBER, 2007

NC STATE PARK	December 2007	TOTAL Dec-07	December 2006	TOTAL Dec-06	% CHANGE (2007/2006) Dec YTD
Carolina Beach	24,056	532,086	23,004	495,682	5% 7%
Cliffs of the Neuse	4,570	128,073	4,089	106,347	12% 20%
Crowders Mountain	20,210	404,143	19,168	368,422	5% 10%
Eno River	18,267	341,686	18,172	311,396	1% 10%
Falls Lake	15,579	890,496	16,730	943,149	-7% -6%
Fort Fisher	13,828	834,544	22,220	623,849	-38% 34%
Fort Macon	43,710	1,214,866	42,046	1,210,080	4% 0%
Goose Creek	9,966	170,707	8,904	154,318	12% 11%
Gorges	4,428	140,495	4,810	114,353	-8% 23%
Hammocks Beach	4,137	117,966	3,741	77,379	11% 52%
Haw River	1,080	24,516	696	3,491	55% 602%
Hanging Rock	15,434	474,455	16,746	410,241	-8% 16%
Jones Lake	1,889	69,974	1,881	67,390	0% 4%
Jordan Lake	0	1,132,995	63,991	1,052,256	-100% 8%
Jockey's Ridge	30,571	1,515,734	49,594	1,058,251	-38% 43%
Kerr Lake	36,924	1,148,632	34,392	1,162,636	7% -1%
Lake James	15,984	383,566	33,764	680,110	-53% -44%
Lake Norman	27,342	523,008	18,612	445,392	47% 17%
Lake Waccamaw	3,159	85,657	3,252	89,274	-3% -4%
Lumber River	3,132	80,548	7,664	83,986	-59% -4%
Merchants Millpond	10,814	150,019	12,700	253,669	-15% -41%
Medoc Mountain	2,592	57,615	2,200	55,185	18% 4%
Mount Jefferson	4,844	98,032	6,336	92,538	-24% 6%
Mount Mitchell	2,824	316,708	4,560	289,087	-38% 10%
Morrow Mountain	14,940	401,800	15,440	356,522	-3% 13%
New River	5,359	189,101	3,460	185,335	55% 2%
Occonechee Mountain	4,680	65,219	3,720	56,536	26% 15%
Pettigrew	4,144	66,551	3,888	72,317	7% -8%
Pilot Mountain	15,464	404,360	18,077	396,522	-14% 2%
Raven Rock	5,288	100,426	4,986	98,151	6% 2%
Singletary Lake	1,958	33,035	769	35,421	155% -7%
South Mountains	11,858	198,845	10,136	205,814	17% -3%
Stone Mountain	14,112	467,214	15,784	409,376	-11% 14%
Weymouth Woods	3,754	49,770	4,362	46,719	-14% 7%
William B. Umstead	32,158	612,411	32,158	596,793	0% 3%
SYSTEMWIDE	429,055	13,425,253	532,052	12,607,987	-19% 6%



Our Mission Remains...

to protect North Carolina's **natural diversity**;

to provide and promote **outdoor recreation** opportunities throughout North Carolina;

to exemplify and encourage **good stewardship** of North Carolina's natural resources for all citizens and visitors.

*8,000 copies of this public document were printed
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SAFETY ZONE

LANDSCAPING BEGINS WITH SAFETY CHECK

✓Check your equipment after the winter layoff; make sure the engine brake and shut-off on your push mower is operating and that all the proper guards are in place.

✓Check your riding mower's safety switches for proper operation and do not bypass any of these switches.

✓Wear proper clothing, shoes and personal protective equipment when mowing either on the job or at home.

The Steward
NC Division of Parks and Recreation
Public Information Office
1615 MSC
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615

